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(54) Title: OVERPRODUCTION OF NEURONAL NITRIC OXIDE SYNTHASE (57) Abstract The present invention is directed to overproduction of nitric oxide synthase (NOS) in a prokaryote. More particularly, the invention involves overexpression of functional neuronal NOS in a protease-deficient strain of <i>Escherichia coli</i> , utilizing a pCW vector under the control of the <i>tac</i> promotor. The invention further involves co-expression of the protein with folding agonists, or chaperonins. The enzyme produced is complete with heme and flavins, and may be activated by incubation with tetrahydrobiopterin. It may be isolated as a predominantly high spin heme protein that demonstrates spectral properties which are identical to those of nNOS isolated from human kidney 293 cells. The methods disclosed are contemplated to be useful in expressing large amounts of other nitric oxide synthases, as well as other proteins that are difficult to produce correctly folded in prokaryotes.		

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DESCRIPTIONOVERPRODUCTION OF NEURONAL
NITRIC OXIDE SYNTHASE

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BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION1. Field of the Invention

10 The present invention relates generally to the
fields of molecular biology and protein synthesis. More
particularly, it concerns methods of increasing
production of biologically functional nitric oxide
synthase and other proteins that require specific post-
15 translational alteration for activity.

2. Description of the Related Art

 Nitric oxide synthase (NOS) catalyzes the formation
20 of NO• and L-citrulline from L-arginine through a series
of oxidations using molecular oxygen (Bredt and Snyder,
1990). There are at least three separate genes encoding
the NOS family of proteins, including the constitutively
expressed neuronal (nNOS) (Bredt et al., 1991) and
25 endothelial (ecNOS) (Lamas et al., 1992; Sessa et al.,
1992) isoforms, and the inducible isoform (iNOS) (Xie et
al., 1992; Lowenstein et al., 1992).

 The three isoforms differ in primary sequence
30 (having only 50-60% sequence identity), size,
intracellular location, and regulation. Neuronal NOS
(160 kDa) and iNOS (130 kDa) were purified from the
cytosol (Masters, 1994; Bredt and Snyder, 1994; Schmidt
et al., 1991; Hevel et al., 1991; Stuehr et al., 1991),
35 whereas the ecNOS (135 kDa) was found to be membrane-
bound (Pollock et al., 1991). The nNOS and ecNOS are
constitutively expressed, but modulated by intracellular

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Ca²⁺ levels (Bredt and Snyder, 1990; Forstermann et al., 1991) unlike iNOS which is induced by bacterial endotoxin and is Ca²⁺-independent (Cho et al., 1992). All three isoforms contain calmodulin and tetrahydrobiopterin (BH₄), as well as molar ratios of heme, FMN, and FAD (Hevel et al., 1991; Stuehr et al., 1991; Pollock et al., 1991; Mayer et al., 1991; White and Marletta, 1992; Stuehr and Ikeda-Saito, 1992; McMillan et al., 1992; Klatt et al., 1992). These members of the NOS family are unusual mammalian enzymes in that they catalyze both NADPH-mediated reduction of flavins and heme within the same protein. A cytochrome P450 fatty acid hydroxylase in *Bacillus megaterium* containing both flavins, FAD and FMN, in the same polypeptide chain as the heme has been reported by Narhi and Fulco (1986). Nitric oxide synthases, however, represent the first examples of such complex enzymes from mammalian sources.

Nelson et al. (1993) reportedly describes a relationship between the P450 gene superfamily and the nitric oxide synthase genes as a likely example of convergent evolution. While the nitric oxide synthases contain a carboxyterminal domain with sequence similarity to NADPH-P450 oxidoreductase (Bredt et al., 1991), and also possess heme and other biochemical features indicative of a P450-like function (White & Marletta, 1992), the nitric oxide synthases lack the P450 ten amino acid signature sequence present in 202 of 205 sequences compared in Nelson et al., 1993 and do not exhibit the characteristic I-helix present in all known cytochromes P450 (McMillen et al., 1992). Based on sequence alignments, the percent identity between mouse nitric oxide synthase and 57 cytochrome P450s was an average of 11.6%, about what would be expected for random amino acid sequences (Nelson et al., 1993).

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Mechanistic and structure/function studies of nNOS have been very difficult to conduct due to the minute amounts of protein that can be purified from cerebellar tissue. Bredt and Snyder (1990) reported a yield of 9 μ g of pure protein from 18 rat brains. Bredt, et al. (1991) subsequently cloned and expressed nNOS in human kidney 293 cells, providing a 10-fold enrichment of nNOS in cultured cells over rat brain. The expense and time involved in mammalian cell culture, however, are prohibitive for generating large amounts of enzyme. Other laboratories have expressed nNOS using baculovirus overexpression systems. Charles, et al. (1993) report successful expression, but the majority of this recombinant nNOS is insoluble and inactive; the recombinant enzyme has a specific activity that is 100-fold lower than that of native nNOS isolated from rat cerebellar tissue. Richards and Marletta (1994) improved the yield of active enzyme from the baculovirus system by adding hemin to the media, but still isolated only about 1 mg pure protein from seven to ten 75 cm² monolayer cultures, only about half of which contains heme. More recently, however, Riveros-Moreno et al. (1995) have been more successful with the baculovirus expression system, producing 30mg of highly active enzyme per 17-225cm² flask with one liter of media.

Nitric oxide is a short-lived molecule with a large number of roles, most of which are involved in signalling in the nervous and cardiovascular systems. In these cases, NO• acts by activating a soluble guanylate cyclase in the target cell, which leads to an intracellular accumulation of cyclic 3',5' guanosine monophosphate. This messenger molecule then activates a cascade of intracellular enzymes to bring about the biological effect, which ranges from relaxing isolated blood vessels to neurotransmission to neurodegeneration associated with decreased blood flow in AIDS dementia and Parkinson's

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disease (Ogden and Moore, 1995). In addition, NO• may act as a powerful reactive free radical that may contribute to the cytostatic and neurodegenerative effects of NO•.

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It is therefore advantageous, in certain circumstances, to inhibit the action of NOS as a means of reducing NO• production. Potential advantages of such inhibition include reducing the blood pressure loss that is associated with endotoxic shock, which has been shown to be associated with a large release of NO• arising from the cytokine-inducible NOS of macrophages. These large amounts of NO• have been shown to cause hypotension from uncontrolled vasorelaxation of vascular smooth muscle cells. Other investigators have shown that the selective inhibition of iNOS may be beneficial in treating some forms of inflammatory diseases.

Because numerous potential clinical applications for selective inhibition of both nNOS and iNOS isoforms have been identified, it is therefore advantageous to screen for inhibitors of NOS that will allow the development of new classes of compounds to block the deleterious effects of NO• in selected cells. While several techniques are known for screening for NOS inhibitors, a reliable and relatively inexpensive source of single isoform NOS has heretofore been unavailable.

Problems with the prior art methods of producing NOS include: i) insufficient amounts of protein produced, ii) expense and time involved in mammalian cell culture, iii) insolubility of expressed protein ("inclusion bodies"), iv) inactivity, v) low specific activity, and vi) insufficient incorporation of the many cofactors that are required for enzymatic activity. Because of all of the above problems, known procedures are not completely

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satisfactory, and persons skilled in the art have continued to search for improvements.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

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The present invention seeks to overcome these and other drawbacks inherent in the prior art by providing, for the first time, methods of producing large amounts of NOS or other proteins that are generally difficult to
10 generate in sufficiently pure quantities. Moreover, the proteins produced using these methods are biologically reactivatable by the addition of one or more missing cofactors to yield the holoenzyme.

15 The methods of the present invention allow the production of large quantities of NOS in cultures of prokaryotic cells. Important elements of the host system include the vector (pCW), co-expression of folding agonists (or chaperonins) with nNOS, and a protease-
20 deficient prokaryote as a host. The vector itself does not appear to be responsible for the heme incorporation capability of this system, since other heme-dependent enzymes, can be expressed using other vectors. This vector is, however, compatible with stable transfection
25 of eukaryotic genes into various strains of *E. coli*. It is surprising and unexpected that a prokaryotic host, such as *E. coli*, has the ability to overexpress a complex mammalian enzyme such as nNOS, which contains
30 protoporphyrin IX heme, FAD, FMN, and BH₄ as prosthetic groups. A further advantage of the present system is that calmodulin is not produced, thus precluding activation of the nNOS to produce the cytotoxin NO•. The lack of BH₄ in this system also serves to keep the enzyme
35 "turned off" and so avoid the deleterious effects of NO• over production. Heme, FAD and FMN appear to be incorporated most favorably during protein biosynthesis; a process that is likely facilitated by chaperonins

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(folding agonists). The coexpression of calmodulin may be necessary for the expression of inducible NOS.

An important aspect of the present invention lies in the co-expression of chaperonins with NOS to result in a correctly folded protein that may be biologically reactivatable by the addition of one or more missing cofactors. The chaperonins are a distinct class of ubiquitous proteins that are highly conserved from bacteria to humans (Martinus et al., 1995). They appear to bind nonnative conformations of most proteins, thus preventing aggregation and subsequent inactivation. Chaperonins protect newly synthesized proteins during transport and folding, and, while expressed constitutively, synthesis may be enhanced by stress conditions, such as heat shock. As such, it has been shown that certain heat shock proteins, such as HSP6, HSP10, or HSP90 may serve as chaperonins. Representative examples of bacterial chaperonins include GroEL (*E. coli* chaperonin 60) and GroES (*E. coli* chaperonin 10, Hsp10). GroES has been found to be an essential component of the mitochondrial protein folding apparatus, and participates in various aspects of GroEL function (Hohfeld et al., 1994). Also contemplated as within the scope of the present invention is the use of eukaryotic chaperonins, such as CCT, also known as TCP-1 complex (Kim et al., 1994). This chaperonin is found in the eukaryotic cytosol and has unique structural features that correspond to the ATP-binding site of GroEL, while other regions show no significant identity in the region corresponding to the polypeptide-binding region of GroEL.

Thus, advantages of the present host construct for overproduction of nNOS include: i) fast and inexpensive isolation of large quantities of enzyme, ii) the enzyme is as active as that from a mammalian source, iii) the activity can be controlled by the presence or absence of

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BH₄, iv) insolubility, aggregation, and proteolysis problems are substantially alleviated, and v) the expression system does not require highly specialized equipment other than the usual fermentation and
5 sterilization facilities, vi) essentially pterin-free enzyme, useful for the investigation of the role of BH₄ in NOS function, may be easily produced.

The large amounts of intact, active nNOS that can be
10 generated using this system will make possible the mechanistic, kinetic, and spectroscopic studies required for the understanding of structure/function relationships. This nNOS has a specific activity at least as high as that of kidney 293 cell-expressed
15 enzyme. It is further contemplated that the approach outline set forth herein may also be useful for the overexpression of the other NOS isoforms, such as eNOS and iNOS, in a prokaryotic system. The availability of this expression system for the NOS enzyme will be
20 extremely useful for site-directed mutagenesis and, given the important physiological roles played by the NOS isoforms, drug design and development.

Also disclosed herein are methods of producing
25 nitric oxide synthase, comprising first obtaining a protease-deficient prokaryotic cell that comprises a first nucleotide sequence that encodes a nitric oxide synthase, and a second nucleotide sequence that encodes a folding agonist. Each of the nucleotide sequences is
30 under the control of a promoter, which may be an inducible or constitutive promoter, and the cells may be grown in the presence of heme precursor (δ -aminolevulinate) and flavin precursors. Nitric oxide synthase apoenzyme is isolated from the cell, and
35 incubated with tetrahydrobiopterin for activation from apoenzyme to holoenzyme.

As used in the instant invention, the nucleic acid sequences encoding NOS may be from a variety of prokaryotic and eukaryotic sources. For example, Nakane et al. (1993) cloned and expressed human brain NOS and showed that it was active in skeletal muscle. In addition, Janssens et al. (1992) cloned and expressed human ecNOS, showing that it has close homology with the constitutively expressed brain nNOS, suggesting that ecNOS is a member of the constitutively expressed class of nitric oxide synthases. Lastly, Geller et al. isolated the gene for human hepatocyte iNOS and demonstrated that its activity is present in a wide variety of tissues. Utilizing the methods set forth by the instant inventors, these forms of NOS, as well as functionally equivalent proteins or peptides may be expressed. These functionally equivalent proteins or peptides may be created via the application of recombinant DNA technology, in which changes in the protein structure may be engineered, based on consideration of the properties of the amino acids being exchanged.

In the methods of the present invention, the nucleotide sequence encoding NOS may be carried in an expression vector that contains nucleotide sequences encoding folding agonists, or the genes encoding folding agonists may be on a separate expression vector that is co-transfected with the vector that contains the NOS sequences.

It also is recognized that other large heme, flavin or other prosthetic group-containing proteins could be expressed using a combination of the techniques disclosed herein. For example, heme and flavin biosynthetic precursors are included in the present invention for nNOS expression.

As used herein, the term "apoenzyme" means an enzyme or protein part of an enzyme-cofactor complex that has lost an essential cofactor and is therefore inactive. In addition, the terms "a" and "an" mean "one or more" when
5 used in this application, including the claims.

Nucleic Acid Equivalents

As used herein, the term "nucleic acid segment or
10 fragment" is intended to refer to DNA or RNA molecules that have been isolated free from total genomic or total cellular nucleic acids. Included within the term "nucleic acid segment or fragment" are segments which may be employed in the preparation of vectors, as well as the
15 vectors themselves, including, for example, plasmids, cosmids, phage, viruses, and the like. It will be understood that the present invention also encompasses sequences which are complementary to the sequences listed herein, along with biological functional equivalents
20 thereof, including naturally occurring variants and genetically engineered mutants.

The DNA segments and recombinant vectors of the present invention may variously include the DNA coding
25 regions set forth herein, coding regions bearing selected alterations or modifications in the basic coding region, or may encode larger or smaller polypeptides which nevertheless include sequences encoding functional nNOS.

30 The nucleic acid segments of the present invention, regardless of the length of the coding sequence itself, may be combined with other DNA sequences, such as promoters, polyadenylation signals, additional restriction enzyme sites, multiple cloning sites,
35 prokaryotic ribosome binding sites, other coding segments, and the like, such that their overall length may vary considerably. It is contemplated that a nucleic

acid fragment of almost any length may be employed, with the total length preferably being limited by the ease of preparation and use in the intended recombinant DNA protocol.

5

Recombinant Vectors

Recombinant vectors form important further aspects of the present invention. Particularly useful vectors are contemplated to be those vectors in which the coding portion of the DNA segment, whether encoding a full length protein or smaller peptide, is positioned under the control of a promoter. The promoter may be in the form of the promoter that is naturally associated with NOS gene(s), e.g., in human cells, as may be obtained by isolating the 5' non-coding sequences located upstream of the coding segment or exon, for example, using recombinant cloning and/or PCRTM technology, in connection with the compositions disclosed herein.

20

Representative of the vectors that are suitable in the present invention is that described in U.S. Patent No. 5,240,831 to Barnes, incorporated herein by reference, and Barnes et al., 1991, which describe a vector designated pCW that is adaptable for use with genes encoding the various cytochromes P450. While this vector was chosen because of successful use in expression of a variety of cytochromes P450, including several of the CYP4A gene subfamily, it is proposed that virtually any appropriate bacterial expression plasmid or vector may be employed where desired, at least as a starting point, for expression of NOS. This may include, but are not limited to, pKK (223-3, 233-2, 177-3, 240-11), pTrc99A-C, pDR540, pBK, pET, pRSET (A-C), pBC, pSE (280, 380, 420), pTrc HIS(A-C), pET 11 (a-d), pET 5 (a-c), PET 3 (a-d), pET9 (a-d), pET 12(a-c), pGEX (1-5) and the like.

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In other embodiments, it is contemplated that certain advantages will be gained by positioning the coding DNA segment under the control of a recombinant, or heterologous, promoter. As used herein, a recombinant or heterologous promoter is intended to refer to a promoter that is not normally associated with a NOS gene in its natural environment. Naturally, it will be important to employ a promoter that effectively directs the expression of the DNA segment in the cell type chosen for expression. The use of promoter and cell type combinations for protein expression is generally known to those of skill in the art of molecular biology, for example, see Sambrook et al. (1989). The promoters employed may be constitutive, or inducible, and may be used under the appropriate conditions to direct high level expression of the introduced DNA segment, such as is advantageous in the large-scale production of recombinant proteins or peptides. Appropriate promoter systems contemplated for use in high-level expression include, but are not limited to, *taq*, *lac*, *lac UV5*, *trc*, λ *P_L*, T7 or T3.

As mentioned above, in connection with expression embodiments to prepare recombinant NOS proteins and peptides, it is contemplated that longer DNA segments will most often be used, with DNA segments encoding the entire NOS protein or functional peptide fragments thereof being most preferred. However, it will be appreciated that the use of shorter DNA segments to direct the expression of NOS peptides or epitopic core regions, such as may be used to generate anti-NOS antibodies, also falls within the scope of the invention. In addition, the recombinant vectors and isolated segments may therefore variously include the NOS coding regions themselves, coding regions bearing selected alterations or modifications in the basic coding region, or may encode larger polypeptides which nevertheless

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include sequences that will confer NOS activity when expressed.

Recombinant Host Cells

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The present invention also concerns recombinant host cells that include one or more DNA segments that comprise an isolated NOS gene, as described herein. It is contemplated that virtually any cell may be employed as a recombinant host cell, but that certain advantages may be found in using a bacterial host cell, such as, for example, in the ease of cell growth and manipulation. Examples of preferred bacteria for use as recombinant host cells include, for example, *E. coli*. Other suitable prokaryotic host cells include, but are not limited to, members of the gram negative family Enterobacteriaceae. Representative members of this family include *Serratia*, *Salmonella*, *Pseudomonas*, *Shigella*, *Enterobacter*, *Proteus*, and *Erwinia*.

20

Another important aspect of the invention is use of protease-deficient host cells for the expression of the construct. Exemplary *E. coli* strains include BL21, Y1089 and Y1090hsdR, which are *lon*⁻. Other *E. coli* strains that naturally lack *lon* include, but are not limited to, *rpoH* (*h+pR*), *tsp*, in which a deletion eliminates a periplasmic protease that may degrade overexpressed proteins following lysis, CAG597 (*rpoH165*), CAH626 (*lon*⁻), CAH629 (*lon*⁻), ER1458 (*lon*⁻), pR745 (*lon*⁻) and UT5600 (*ompT*⁻).

30

The recombinant host cells of the invention may be employed either to propagate the vector and/or to express the various peptides and proteins described herein, allowing the encoded components to be obtained essentially free of other human or mammalian components. That is, one may prepare such peptides or proteins by

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recombinant expression using a host cell other than human or mammalian, and/or produce the peptides or proteins at high levels so that their isolation directly results in a significantly enriched preparation.

5

Depending on the host system employed, one may find particular advantages where DNA segments of the present invention are incorporated into appropriate vector sequences that may, e.g., improve the efficiency of transformation of host cells. Where bacterial host cells are employed, it is proposed that virtually any vector known in the art to be appropriate for the selected host cell may be employed. Thus, in the case of *E. coli*, one may find particular advantages through the use of plasmid vectors such as pCW, pBR322, or bacteriophages such as λ GEM-11. Further examples will be known to those of skill in the art, as exemplified in Sambrook et al. (1989).

20 The recombinant host cells may be employed in connection with "overexpressing" NOS proteins or peptides, that is, increasing expression over the natural expression levels in human or other mammalian cells, other bacterial expression systems, or baculovirus-
25 directed systems, and may lead to the production of large quantities of proteins. Overexpression may be assessed by a variety of methods, including radio-labelling and/or protein purification. However, simple and direct methods are preferred, for example, those involving SDS/PAGE and
30 protein staining or Western blotting, followed by quantitative analyses, such as densitometric scanning of the resultant gel or blot. A specific increase in the level of the recombinant protein or peptide, in comparison to the level in natural human or mammalian
35 cells, is indicative of overexpression. Obviously, if this is coupled to spectral identification and/or enzyme activity, the procedure is more thoroughly documented as

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to its useful efficacy in producing "active" protein.
The utilization of spectral methods is particularly
useful with NOS expression systems since heme
incorporation into the biosynthesized protein is key to
5 the success of the expression system.

Various methods may be used to obtain or collect NOS
proteins or peptides from cells, whether native or
recombinant. For example, one method involves lysing
10 cells in the presence of protease inhibitors,
centrifuging to remove debris, and applying the
supernatant to a 2', 5'-ADP-Sepharose 4B column.
Following washing, the protein is eluted in salt buffer
containing 2'-AMP and further concentrated utilizing
15 Centriprep membranes. The fractions are then incubated
with L-arginine and BH_4 , if BH_4 -replete enzyme is
desired, and further fractionated on a S-200 gel
filtration column or MonoQ (ion exchange).

20 It will also be understood that this invention is
not limited to the exact nucleic acid and amino acid
sequences described herein. As a consequence, DNA
segments prepared in accordance with the present
invention may also encode biologically functional
25 equivalent proteins or peptides which have variant amino
acid sequences. Such sequences may arise as a
consequence of codon redundancy and functional
equivalency which are known to occur naturally within
nucleic acid sequences and the proteins thus encoded.
30 Alternatively, functionally equivalent proteins or
peptides may be created via the application of
recombinant DNA technology, in which changes in the
protein structure may be engineered, based on
considerations of the properties of the amino acids being
35 exchanged, i.e., site-directed mutagenesis.

ABBREVIATIONS

	BH ₄	=	tetrahydrobiopterin
	ecNOS	=	endothelial cell isoform of NOS
5	iNOS	=	inducible macrophage isoform of NOS
	NMA	=	N-methyl-L-arginine
	NNA	=	N ^ω -nitro-L-arginine
	NOS	=	nitric oxide synthase
	nNOS	=	neuronal isoform of NOS

10

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The following drawings form part of the present specification and are included to further demonstrate certain aspects of the present invention. The invention may better be understood by reference to one or more of these drawings in combination with the detailed description of specific embodiments presented herein.

20 FIG. 1A shows absolute absorbance of nNOS as purified from *E. coli*. Studies were performed as described in Example 2 using 3.2 μM nNOS.

25 FIG. 1B shows CO difference spectra of nNOS as purified from *E. coli*. Studies were performed as described in Example 2 using 1.9 μM nNOS.

30 FIG. 2 shows perturbation of *E. coli*-expressed nNOS absolute absorbance spectrum. Studies were performed as described in Example 2 using 3.2 μM nNOS. Line a is the unperturbed spectrum of purified nNOS; line b is the spectrum following the addition of 1 mM imidazole to nNOS; and line c is the spectrum following the addition of 2 μM L-arginine to nNOS.

35

FIG. 3A shows substrate perturbation difference spectra of *E. coli*-expressed nNOS. Studies were

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performed as described in Example 2 using 1.5 μM nNOS in the presence of 1 mM imidazole. The purified enzyme was titrated with L-arginine to final concentrations of 0, 0.2, 0.4, 0.6, 0.8, 1.0, 1.2, 1.4, 1.6, 1.8, and 2.0 μM (baseline and sequential minima, respectively).

FIG. 3B shows a plot from which the apparent K_s was derived using the data of FIG. 3A.

FIG. 4 shows binding of [^3H]-N $^{\omega}$ -nitro-L-arginine to *E. coli*-expressed nNOS. Studies were performed as described in Example 4 using 10 pmole nNOS. Symbols are: circles, semi-purified *E. coli*-expressed nNOS eluted from a 2'5'-ADP-Sepharose 4B column in the absence of BH_4 during purification; triangles, purified *E. coli*-expressed nNOS purified in the presence of BH_4 as described in Example 1; open symbols represent data from assays performed in the absence of additional BH_4 ; filled symbols represent data from assays performed in the presence of 10 μM BH_4 .

FIG. 5 shows an example of the plasmid construct NOSpCW used in the instant invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

The present invention involves the successful overproduction of nitric oxide synthase (NOS) in a prokaryote. In particular, overexpression of functional neuronal NOS in *Escherichia coli*, with average yields of 125-150 nmol enzyme/liter of cells is provided in the present disclosure. An important aspect of the present invention is the subcloning of the cDNA for nNOS into a pCW vector under the control of the *tac* promotor and the co-expression of this construct with the chaperonins groEL and groES in a protease (-) BL21 strain of *E. coli*. The enzyme produced is replete with heme and flavins and,

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after overnight incubation with tetrahydrobiopterin, contains 0.7 pmol tetrahydrobiopterin/pmol nNOS. It is isolated as a predominantly high spin heme protein and demonstrates spectral properties which are identical to those of nNOS isolated from human kidney 293 cells.

The product of the NADPH-mediated reaction, NO•, has been implicated in neurotransmission in the brain and in neuromuscular junctions (nNOS), hemodynamic regulation (ecNOS), and cytotoxicity (iNOS). The effects of NO• produced by the nNOS and ecNOS are thought to be mediated through the stimulation of guanylate cyclase activity, whereas the NO• or the product of its interaction with O₂•, peroxynitrite (ONOO•), produced by iNOS appears to act directly on foreign cells (reviewed by Masters, 1994; Bredt and Snyder, 1994).

The isolated protein binds N^ω-nitro-L-arginine, dependent on the presence of bound tetrahydrobiopterin, and exhibits a K_d of 45 nM. Surprisingly, the enzyme is completely functional, with a specific activity of 450 nmol/min/mg. The overexpression system of the present invention is useful for rapid, inexpensive preparation of large amounts of active nNOS for use in mechanistic and structure/function studies, for use in screening candidate substances for inhibition of various forms of NOS, as well as for drug design and development.

The nNOS enzyme produced by *E. coli* appears to be indistinguishable, in all respects examined, from that produced by nNOS stably-transfected human kidney 293 cells; the absolute spectrum and its perturbation by the substrate L-arginine (spectral binding constant ≈ 717 nM), the CO difference spectrum, the binding constant for [³H]-NNA (≈ 45 nM), and the specific activity of *E. coli*-expressed nNOS is at least equal to or greater than the mammalian cell-expressed nNOS.

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The enzyme produced by the methods of the instant invention is quite active, with a turnover of 450 nmol/min/mg NOS, as measured by both the hemoglobin capture assay and the conversion of [^3H]-L-arginine to [^3H]-L-citrulline, and this activity is 95% inhibited by 100 μM NMA, indicating that NMA is effectively competing at the substrate binding site. The K_m value of *E. coli*-expressed nNOS for L-arginine is 2.8 μM , in good agreement with both that of nNOS isolated from transfected human kidney 293 cells ($\approx 2 \mu\text{M}$) and that reported by Bredt and Snyder (1990) for nNOS isolated from rat brain ($\approx 2 \mu\text{M}$).

While fraction 2 (FIG. 4) seems to be fully complemented with BH_4 , additional BH_4 added to the assay serves to increase enzyme activity further but not markedly. This may be due to the instability of BH_4 that is bound to the enzyme. The difference between the enzymatic activities exhibited by the pre-and post- BH_4 fractions, however, is 2-fold whether or not BH_4 is included in the assay. It appears that the earlier the nNOS is saturated with BH_4 , the higher the activity, i.e., the more stable the enzyme.

Even though the invention has been described with a certain degree of particularity, it is evident that many alternatives, modifications, and variations will be apparent to those skilled in the art in light of the foregoing disclosure. Accordingly, it is intended that all such alternatives, modifications, and variations which fall within the spirit and the scope of the invention be embraced by the defined claims.

The following examples are included to demonstrate preferred embodiments of the invention. It should be appreciated by those of skill in the art that the techniques disclosed in the examples which follow

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represent techniques discovered by the inventor to function well in the practice of the invention, and thus can be considered to constitute preferred modes for its practice. However, those of skill in the art should, in
5 light of the present disclosure, appreciate that many changes can be made in the specific embodiments which are disclosed and still obtain a like or similar result without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention.

10

EXAMPLE 1

Overproduction of Neuronal NOS in *E. coli*

The present example describes constructs and methods
15 for the overproduction of functional neuronal nitric oxide synthase in *E. coli*.

Chemicals. L-[2,3-³H] arginine was obtained from DuPont NEN (Boston, MA), and (6R)-5, 6, 7, 8 tetrahydro-
20 L-biopterin (BH₄) was from Research Biochemicals International (Natick, MA). All other chemicals were obtained from Sigma Chemical Co. (St. Louis, MO) and were of the highest grade available.

25 *Enzymes.* Taq polymerase, ligase, and restriction enzymes were from Promega (Cambridge, MA) or New England Biolabs (Boston, MA). Shrimp alkaline phosphatase was from United States Biochemical (Cleveland, OH).

30 *Plasmids.* pNOS (Bredt et al., 1991), containing the rat nNOS cDNA in Bluescript SK(-), was generously provided by Drs. Solomon Snyder and David Bredt at Johns Hopkins Medical School, Baltimore, MD. pGroESL
(Goloubinoff et al., 1989), containing groEL and groES
35 cDNAs, was a gift from Dr. Paul Horowitz at the UT Health Science Center in San Antonio, TX. pCW_{ori+} (Gegner and Dahlquist, 1991) was obtained by Dr. Michael Waterman at

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Vanderbilt University in Nashville, TN, and shared with us by permission. The production of nNOS is controlled by the tac promoter of pCW in an effort to abate a major drawback of the baculoviral system, poor heme incorporation. Since initial studies were plagued by highly proteolyzed and dysfunctional protein, an expression plasmid for the chaperonins groEL and groES (Wynn et al., 1994) was also included.

Recombinant DNA manipulations. nNOSpCW, the plasmid for the expression of nNOS in *E. coli*, was constructed as follows. The initial 1210 nucleotides of pNOS (from the ATG start codon to the NarI restriction site) were amplified by PCRTM to incorporate the recognition sequence for NdeI. Primer 1 (upstream primer, with NdeI site) was 5'-TCATCATCATATACTGAAGAGAACACGTT-3' (SEQ ID NO: 1) and primer 2 (return primer) was 5'-CATGCTTGGCGCCAT-3' (SEQ ID NO: 2). Primers were synthesized by the Center for Advanced DNA Technologies at the UT Health Science Center at San Antonio. Reaction mixtures included 50 pmol of each primer, 20 ng pNOS template, 200 μ M dNTPs, 1.5 mM MgCl₂, 1 x Taq polymerase buffer, and 2.5 units Taq polymerase in 100 μ l total volume. The mixture was preincubated for 3 minutes at 94°C prior to the addition of Taq polymerase, followed by amplification for 30 cycles: 94°C for 30 s, 55°C for 60 s, and 72°C for 90 s. The PCRTM product was gel-purified using the Gene/Clean II kit (Bio101, Vista, CA) and digested with NdeI and NarI. pNOS DNA was then restricted with NarI and XbaI to generate the remaining 3529 nucleotides of the NOS cDNA sequence, which was also gel-purified. pCW_{ori+} DNA was digested with NdeI and XbaI and the ends were dephosphorylated. The three pieces were ligated, and the resultant products were used to transform *E. coli* JM109 competent cells (Stratagene, San Diego, CA) using the manufacturer's instructions.

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The transformation mixture was plated on LB agar containing 50 $\mu\text{g/ml}$ ampicillin and nine colonies were screened by BamHI restriction digest of alkaline lysis plasmid minipreparations. Five positive clones were further screened for IPTG-induced (0.5 mM, added at $\text{OD}_{600}=0.8$, along with 225 μM δ -aminolevulinic acid, a heme precursor) expression of nNOS at 37°C by immunoblot analysis of whole cells using rabbit anti-rat nNOS IgG. All five clones exhibited bands which co-migrated with that of nNOS isolated from kidney 293 cells.

In subsequent manipulations, when pGroELS was co-transformed with nNOSpCW, transformants were plated on LB agar containing 50 $\mu\text{g/ml}$ ampicillin and 35 $\mu\text{g/ml}$ chloramphenicol. Due to severe proteolysis of nNOS when JM109 cells were lysed, both plasmids were also co-transformed into the protease-deficient *E. coli* strain BL21. Transformation of BL21 was via electroporation using an Invitrogen Electroporator II (San Diego, CA) according to manufacturer's instructions.

Protein expression. Fernbach flasks containing 1 liter of modified Terrific Broth (20 g yeast extract, 10 g bactotryptone, 2.65 g KH_2PO_4 , 4.33 g Na_2HPO_4 , 4 ml glycerol) and 50 $\mu\text{g/ml}$ ampicillin and, when pGroELS was present, 35 $\mu\text{g/ml}$ chloramphenicol were inoculated with 1 ml of an overnight culture (grown in LB + antibiotics) and shaken at 250 rpm at 37°C. Protein expression was induced at $\text{OD}_{600}=1.0-1.4$ with the addition of IPTG to 0.5 mM. The heme and flavin precursors, δ -aminolevulinic acid and riboflavin, were also added to final concentrations of 450 μM and 3 μM , respectively. When pGroELS was present, ATP to 1 mM was also added to the culture media. The flasks were moved to room temperature (25°C) and shaken in the dark at 250 rpm. The cells were harvested at about 40 hours post-induction in the cell paste frozen at -80°C until purification.

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JM109 cells containing pNOSpCW grown post-induction at 37°C exhibit no detectable peak at 445 nm in CO difference spectra; all protein is present as a 420 nm species. JM109 containing pNOSpCW grown at 25°C for 36-40 hours post-induction have both 445 and 420 nm species; this protein is heavily proteolyzed upon cell lysis, as judged by immunoblot analysis. The absolute amount of protein production in JM109 is enhanced 5-10-fold upon co-expression of nNOS with groEL and groES, but this protein is still heavily proteolyzed upon cell lysis. A small amount of activity (1% that of nNOS purified from 293 cells) can be detected. BL21 cells containing pNOSpCW do not appear to express nNOS as detectable by CO difference spectra. BL21 cells containing both pNOSpCW and pGroELS, however, produce 125-250 moles nNOS (20-24 mg) per liter of culture, as quantitated by CO difference spectra. All data presented in Examples 1-5 are derived using protein purified from BL21 that has been co-transformed with both pNOSpCW and pGroELS.

20

Protein purification. Harvested cells were resuspended in 30 ml of resuspension buffer (100 mM Tris-HCl, pH 7.4, 1 mM EDTA, 1 mM dithiothreitol, 10% glycerol, 1 mM phenylmethylsulfonyl-fluoride, and 5 µg/ml leupeptin/pepstatin) per liter of initial culture and were lysed by pulsed sonication (four minutes, 80% power, large probe, Fisher Scientific Model 550). Cell debris was removed by centrifugation at 150,000 x g for 70 minutes. The supernatant was applied to 2'5'-ADP-Sepharose 4B column (6 ml, Pharmacia) equilibrated in buffer B (50 mM Tris-HCl, pH 7.4, 0.1 mM EDTA, 0.1 mM dithiothreitol, 10% glycerol, and 100 mM NaCl). The column was extensively washed with at least 10 column volumes of buffer B, and then again with buffer B containing 500 mM NaCl. The protein was eluted with buffer B containing 500 mM NaCl and 5 mM 2'-AMP. The colored fractions were pooled and concentrated

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(Centriprep 30, Amicon), and L-arginine and BH_4 were added to final concentrations of 2 mM and 1 mM, respectively. This fraction was incubated overnight at 4°C and applied to a S-200 gel filtration column (480 ml, 2.5 cm diameter, Pharmacia) equilibrated in buffer B. The nNOS-containing fractions were pooled, concentrated, and stored at -80°C. All manipulations were performed at 4°C. At this point, the enzyme is approximately 70% pure, with only one other major contaminant.

Substitution of MonoQ ion exchange for the S200 gel filtration chromatography step results in an about 90% pure product.

In the present invention, nNOS is co-expressed with the *E. coli* groE molecular chaperonin system (groEL and groES). In the absence of these proteins, expression of nNOS is much lower in *E. coli* strain JM109 and undetectable in *E. coli* BL21. Chaperonins facilitate the proper folding of some proteins, probably by inhibiting aggregation and/or by alleviating kinetic blocks to folding. The expression of correctly folded proteins is not necessarily assisted by the presence of chaperonins. For example, Lah et al. (1994) have shown that cosynthesis of GroEL and GroES chaperonin with phagemid-produced antibody fragments fused to a bacteriophage coat protein resulted in complete proteolysis of the fusion product. The observation that substantially more nNOS is produced in the presence of chaperonins utilizing the methods and compositions of the instant invention further demonstrates the utility of this approach.

The *E. coli* strain JM109 was initially chosen for the expression of nNOS but, upon lysis of the cells, the calmodulin binding site proved to be extremely susceptible to proteolytic attack. As a result of this sensitivity, large amounts of the proteolytically-produced domains of *E. coli*-expressed nNOS were initially

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purified, a problem which was alleviated by co-expressing the nNOS and chaperonins in BL21, a strain reported to be lacking both lon and ompT proteases and which apparently also makes significantly more tetrahydrobiopterin than the commonly used JM109. When the calmodulin-binding site is covered by calmodulin, no digestion by trypsin is observed (Sheta et al., 1994) at this site but other susceptible sites are cleared.

EXAMPLE 2

Spectral Properties of Overproduced nNOS

The present Example demonstrates spectral characteristics of the overproduced neuronal NOS.

Spectrophotometric methods. Absolute spectra and CO difference spectra were performed essentially as described by McMillan and Masters (1993) with the exception that all measurements were performed in buffer B and the CO difference spectra were obtained by reducing the protein and then bubbling the sample cuvette with CO. Substrate perturbation difference spectra were performed as described (McMillan and Masters, 1993), but in the presence of 1 mM imidazole to shift the entire population of nNOS to the low spin heme state. The molar protein concentration was determined based on heme content and $\Delta\epsilon_{444-475}=75 \text{ mM}^{-1}$ (Stuehr and Ikeda-Saito, 1992; McMillan and Masters, 1995). All spectral analyses were performed using a Shimadzu Model 2101 UV/visible dual-beam spectrophotometer.

Determination of heme content. The heme content of the purified protein preparation was measured by CO difference spectra and by the pyridine hemochromogen method (Rieske, 1967). A 30- μl aliquot of pyridine was added to 70 μl of purified protein, along with 1.5 μl 10 N NaOH. The sample was reduced with two grains of

- 25 -

dithionite and the spectrum read after two minutes. Heme concentration was determined by the absorbance at 556 nm, assuming $\epsilon = 34 \text{ mM}^{-1}$.

5 *Spectral characteristics of purified E. coli-expressed enzyme.* FIG. 1A shows the absolute spectrum of nNOS isolated from *E. coli*. It exhibits a broad peak at 400 nm and secondary maxima at 550 and 650 nm, indicative of a predominantly high spin heme, although some low spin
10 form is present, as evidenced by the shoulder at 410 nm. Shoulders are also apparent at 450 and 475 nm and are due to flavin absorbance; this spectrum is identical to that of nNOS isolated from human kidney 293 cells (McMillan et al., 1992). As shown in FIG. 2, the maximum heme
15 absorbance at 400 nm can be shifted to the low spin form (peak at 428 nm) by the addition of imidazole to 1 mM or completely to the high spin form (peak at 395 nm) by the addition of arginine to 2 μM .

20 FIG. 1B shows the CO difference spectrum of nNOS with a peak at 444 nm. The molar concentration of heme-containing enzyme, calculated from the peak at 444 nm assuming $\Delta\epsilon_{444-475} = 75 \text{ mM}^{-1}$ is 1.9 μM . For comparison, a pyridine hemochromogen spectrum was also obtained to
25 determine the heme concentration yielding a concentration of 2.1 μM , in reasonable agreement with that calculated from the reduced, co-difference spectrum.

30 Using the technique of difference spectrophotometry, the perturbation of the heme spectrum by increments of L-arginine, in the presence of 1 mM imidazole, was measured (FIG. 2A). A "type I" spectrum, characterized by a maximum at about 390 nm and a minimum at about 430 nm, was observed with each addition of L-arginine. A
35 spectral binding constant (K_s) was calculated from the apparent K_s , derived from a plot of 1/absorbance change vs. 1/[L-arginine] (FIG. 2B), using the following:

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$$\text{apparent } K_S = K_S (1 + [\text{Imidazole}]/K_d \text{ imidazole}).$$

Assuming K_d imidazole to be 160 μM (McMillan and Masters, 1993; Wolff et al., 1993), the value of K_S for
5 arginine binding to nNOS is 717 nM.

The heme moiety appears to be inserted correctly into the majority of expressed nNOS protein, as judged by the absolute and CO difference spectra and the spectral
10 perturbation by the substrate L-arginine. The lack of heme-repletion, which seems to be a major drawback of the expression of NOS in a baculovirus system (Charles et al., 1993; Richards and Marletta, 1994), is overcome by
expression in *E. coli*. There is ample evidence that the
15 expression of cytochromes P450 in baculovirus systems results in heme-depleted product that, in some cases, can be remedied by the addition of hemin or precursors of heme in the porphyrinogenic pathway.

20

EXAMPLE 3

Pterin Content of Overproduced nNOS

Apoenzyme (nNOS without the cofactor BH_4) can be purified from the expression system of the present
25 invention, and, upon incubation with BH_4 , is reconstituted to form the holoenzyme.

Pterin analysis. Determination of pterin content was performed as described by Gross and Levi (Gross and
30 Levi, 1992), based on the method of Fukushima and Nixon (Fukushima and Nixon, 1980), by acid hydrolysis of 10 ng protein sample followed by quantitation of pterin by C18 reverse phase HPLC.

35 *Pterin analysis of purified E. coli-expressed enzyme.* Pterin content was determined in two different samples of nNOS: 1) partially purified enzyme before BH_4

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incubation (fraction 1; pre-S-200 column chromatography);
2) purified enzyme after BH₄ incubation (fraction 2;
post-S-200 column chromatography). The analysis reveals
that, as isolated, fraction 1 contains 0.096 pmol
5 BH₄/pmol nNOS, i.e., 10% of the expressed nNOS contains
BH₄. No other pterin moiety was present. This is in
contrast to the nNOS heme domain expressed in *E. coli*
JM109, which contained only 1-2% BH₄, as well as being ≈
30% saturated with non-BH₄ pterin. BH₄ is required for
10 optimal activity of nNOS as shown in the present
invention, but its role in the mechanism of NOS activity
catalyzed by any of the isoforms is not presently known
(Mayer et al., 1991); Schmidt et al., 1992); Marletta,
1993). Fraction 2 was complemented with 0.636 pmol
15 BH₄/pmol nNOS, i.e., 64% saturated. Thus, if
stoichiometric binding of BH₄ is required for activity,
this preparation of nNOS contains 64% active enzyme.

EXAMPLE 4

20 Binding of Substrate Analog to Overproduced nNOS

The present Example demonstrates that binding of a
substrate analog is dependent upon the presence in the
enzyme of the cofactor, tetrahydrobiopterin.

25

Determination of N^ω-nitro-L-arginine binding
constant. The N^ω-nitro-L-arginine (NNA) binding constant
was determined by direct titration of purified nNOS with
[³H]-NNA. In these studies, performed in 96-well PVDF
30 plates in 100 μl total volume, 10 pmol nNOS and
radiolabeled NNA (specific activity ≈ 23,000 dpm/pmole)
were incubated at room temperature for 15 minutes in 50
mM Tris-HCl, pH 7.6, 1 mM dithiothreitol, in the presence
or absence of 10 μM BH₄. Assays were also performed in
35 the presence or absence of 100 μM N-methyl-L-arginine
(NMA), a potent inhibitor of L-arginine binding. The
incubation was stopped by aspiration of the sample

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through the PVDF membrane. The wells were washed twice with 200 μ l of 50 mM Tris, pH 7.6, air-dried for 10 minutes, 25 μ l scintillation cocktail was added, and samples were counted.

5

Binding of N^ω-nitro-arginine to purified E. coli-expressed enzyme. The binding of [³H]-NNA as a function of ligand concentration was determined in the presence and absence of additional BH₄ for both fractions 1 (pre-BH₄) and 2 (post-BH₄). As shown in FIG. 4 and Table 1, NNA binds significantly to *E. coli*-expressed nNOS fraction 1 only in the presence of added BH₄. The binding constant (k_d) and the maximum amount of NNA bound (B_{max}) differ greatly depending on whether or not BH₄ is added shown in Table 1. Fraction 2, which is 65% BH₄-saturated, binds NNA equally well in the presence or absence of added BH₄; k_d and B_{max} are the same regardless of whether BH₄ is added or not. In the presence of 100 μ M N-methyl-L-arginine (L-NMA), the binding of NNA is essentially abolished in either fraction. Thus, NNA binding is dependent on the presence of bound BH₄ and the k_d for NNA binding is approximately 45 nM. In addition, fraction 1 enzyme can be reconstituted with BH₄ up to 54% and fraction 2 enzyme does not bind additional BH₄, i.e., it appears to be maximally complemented.

25

Table 1

	k_d (Nm)	B_{max} (pmol NNA/pmol nNOS)
Fraction 1		
(+) BH_4	41	0.54
(--) BH_4	483	0.078
Fraction 2		
(+) BH_4	37	0.69
(--) BH_4	58	0.67

EXAMPLE 5

Enzymatic Activity of Overproduced nNOS

The present example demonstrates that the rat neuronal NOS overexpressed in *E. coli* is functional in having a specific activity equal to or exceeding the activity of kidney 293 cell-derived enzyme.

Enzymatic activity determined by the rate of NO• formation. The rate of nitric oxide formation was measured using both the hemoglobin capture assay (Kelm and Schrader, 1990), performed at 25°C as described by Sheta, et al. (1994), and the method of Bredt and Snyder (1990), which monitors the formation of [3H] L-citrulline from [3H] L-arginine, as described previously (McMillan et al., 1992). Each reaction mixture, containing 0.5 mg of enzyme, was incubated at 25°C for 2 minutes (over which time the reaction is linear). For K_m analysis, the concentration of [3H] L-arginine in the reaction mixture was varied over the range of 2.0-10.0 μM .

*Enzymatic activity of purified *E. coli*-expressed enzyme.* The conversion of L-arginine to L-citrulline was assayed for fractions 1 (pre- BH_4) and 2 (post- BH_4) in the presence and absence of additional BH_4 . The turnover numbers for fraction 1 were 75 and 202 nmole/min/mg

- 30 -

without and with BH_4 in the assay mixture, respectively, a stimulation of 2.7-fold. The turnover numbers for fraction 2 were 189 and 435 nmole/min/mg without and with BH_4 in the assay mixture, respectively, a stimulation of 2.3-fold. The enzymatic activity is inhibited by 95% by NMA in all cases; this is consistent with the inhibition of NNA binding by NMA. The turnover numbers for both fractions in the presence of BH_4 were confirmed using the hemoglobin capture assay (previous paragraph); the activities of fractions 1 and 2 were 239 and 468 nmol/min/mg, respectively, demonstrating excellent agreement between the two methods. These turnover numbers are very similar to those obtained with nNOS purified from human kidney 293 cells in which activities between 300 and 450 nmole/min/mg are typically observed.

The K_m value for L-arginine was determined to be 2.8 μM for *E. coli*-purified nNOS. Concomitant measurement using human kidney 293 cell-purified nNOS yielded a K_m value of 1.9 μM . These values are in excellent agreement with each other and with the K_m value of 2 μM for nNOS reported by Bredt and Snyder (1990).

* * *

All of the compositions and methods disclosed and claimed herein can be made and executed without undue experimentation in light of the present disclosure. While the compositions and methods of this invention have been described in terms of preferred embodiments, it will be apparent to those of skill in the art that variations may be applied to the composition, methods and in the steps or in the sequence of steps of the method described herein without departing from the concept, spirit and scope of the invention. More specifically, it will be apparent that certain agents which are both chemically and physiologically related may be substituted for the

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agents described herein while the same or similar results would be achieved. All such similar substitutes and modifications apparent to those skilled in the art are deemed to be within the spirit, scope and concept of the
5 invention as defined by the appended claims.

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The following references, to the extent that they provide exemplary procedural or other details
5 supplementary to those set forth herein, are specifically incorporated herein by reference.

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SEQUENCE LISTING

(1) GENERAL INFORMATION:

5

(i) APPLICANT:

(A) NAME: BOARD OF REGENTS, THE UNIVERSITY OF
TEXAS SYSTEM

(B) STREET: 201 West 7th Street

10 (C) CITY: Austin

(D) STATE: Texas

(E) COUNTRY: United States of America

(F) POSTAL CODE (ZIP): 78701

15 (ii) TITLE OF INVENTION: OVERPRODUCTION OF NEURONAL
NITRIC OXIDE SYNTHASE

(iii) NUMBER OF SEQUENCES: 2

20 (iv) COMPUTER READABLE FORM:

(A) MEDIUM TYPE: Floppy disk

(B) COMPUTER: IBM PC compatible

(C) OPERATING SYSTEM: PC-DOS/MS-DOS

25 (D) SOFTWARE: PatentIn Release #1.0, Version
#1.30 (EPO)

(vi) PRIOR APPLICATION DATA:

(A) APPLICATION NUMBER: US 08/519,105

(B) FILING DATE: 24-AUG-1995

30

(2) INFORMATION FOR SEQ ID NO: 1:

(i) SEQUENCE CHARACTERISTICS:

35 (A) LENGTH: 30 base pairs

(B) TYPE: nucleic acid

(C) STRANDEDNESS: single

- 37 -

(D) TOPOLOGY: linear

(xi) SEQUENCE DESCRIPTION: SEQ ID NO: 1:

5 TCATCATCAT ATAAGTGAAG AGAACACGTT

30

(2) INFORMATION FOR SEQ ID NO: 2:

10 (i) SEQUENCE CHARACTERISTICS:
(A) LENGTH: 15 base pairs
(B) TYPE: nucleic acid
(C) STRANDEDNESS: single
(D) TOPOLOGY: linear

15

(xi) SEQUENCE DESCRIPTION: SEQ ID NO: 2:

CATGCTTGGC GCCAT

15

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CLAIMS:

1. A prokaryotic host cell comprising a first
5 nucleotide sequence that encodes a nitric oxide synthase
and a second nucleotide sequence that encodes a folding
agonist, wherein said cell is protease-deficient.
- 10 2. The host cell according to claim 1, wherein the
prokaryotic cell is *E. coli*, *Serratia*, *Salmonella*,
Pseudomonas, *Shigella*, *Enterobacter*, *Proteus*, and
Erwinia.
- 15 3. The host cell according to claim 2, wherein the
prokaryotic cell is *lon*⁻ or *ompT*⁻.
- 20 4. The host cell according to claim 3, wherein the
prokaryotic cell is *lon*⁻.
5. The host cell according to claim 2, wherein the
25 prokaryotic cell is *E. coli* BL21, CAG 597, CAG626,
CAG629, ER1458, PR745, Y1089, T1090, or UT5600.
6. The host cell according to claim 5, wherein the
30 prokaryotic cell is *E. coli* BL21.
7. The host cell according to claim 1 wherein the
nitric oxide synthase is nNOS, ecNOS or iNOS.
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8. The host cell according to claim 1, wherein the folding agonist is GroEL, GroES, HSP6, HSP10, or HSP90.
- 5 9. The host cell according to claim 8, wherein the folding agonist is groEL or GroES.
- 10 10. The host cell according to claim 8, wherein the folding agonists are groEL and groES.
- 15 11. The host cell according to claim 1, wherein the nucleotide sequence encoding a nitric oxide synthase is part of an expression vector.
- 20 12. The host cell according to claim 1, wherein the nucleotide sequence encoding the folding agonist is part of an expression vector.
- 25 13. The host cell according to claim 11, wherein the vector is PCW, pKK (223-3, 233-2, 177-3, 240-11), pTrc99A-C, pDR540, pBK, pET, or pRSET (A-C).
- 30 14. The host cell according to claim 13, wherein the vector is PCW.
- 35 15. The host cell according to claim 1 further comprising an inducible promoter.
16. The host cell according to claim 15, wherein the inducible promoter is operatively linked to the first nucleotide sequence that encodes a nitric oxide synthase.

17. The host cell according to claim 15, wherein the inducible promoter is operatively linked to the first nucleotide sequence that encodes a nitric oxide synthase and the second nucleotide sequence that encodes a folding agonist.
18. The host cell according to claim 15, comprising the gene for the folding agonist located on an expression vector that is separate from the expression vector carrying the nucleotide sequence encoding NOS.
19. The host cell according to claim 18, wherein the folding agonist is groEL or groES.
20. The host cell according to claim 19, wherein the folding agonist is groEL and groES.
21. The host cell according to claim 15, wherein the inducible promoter is taq, lac, lac UV5, trc, lambda P_L, T7, or T3.
22. The host cell according to claim 1, wherein the NOS and the folding agonist are on separate expression plasmids.
23. The host cell according to claim 22, wherein one expression plasmid is capable of expressing the chaperonins groEL and groES.

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24. The host cell according to claim 1 wherein the host cell is tetrahydrobiopterin-deficient.

5 25. A method of producing nitric oxide synthase comprising:

10 (i) obtaining a protease-deficient prokaryotic cell, the cell comprising a first nucleotide sequence that encodes a nitric oxide synthase, and a second nucleotide sequence that encodes a folding agonist; and

15 (ii) isolating nitric oxide synthase apoenzyme from the cell.

20 26. The method according to 25, wherein the nucleotide sequences are each under the control of an inducible promoter.

25 27. The method according to claim 25 further comprising growing the cells in the presence of heme precursor (δ -aminolevulinate) or flavin precursors.

30 28. The method according to claim 27 further comprising growing the cells in the presence of heme precursor (δ -aminolevulinate) and flavin precursors.

35 29. The method according to claim 25 further comprising incubating the apoenzyme with a source of tetrahydrobiopterin.

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30. The method according to claim 25, wherein the nucleotide sequence encoding a nitric oxide synthase is part of an expression vector.

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31. The method according to claim 25 comprising the nucleotide sequence encoding the folding agonist on a separate expression vector.

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32. An apoenzyme comprising a nitric oxide synthase protein produced by the method according to claim 25 and being inactive for production of nitric oxide and having activity for synthesis of nitric oxide in the presence of tetrahydrobiopterin.

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33. The apoenzyme according to claim 32, wherein the nitric oxide synthase protein is nNOS, ecNOS, iNOS, or variants thereof.

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34. The apoenzyme according to claim 33, wherein the nitric oxide synthase protein is nNOS.

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35. A nitric oxide synthase apoenzyme made by a process comprising

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(i) obtaining a protease-deficient prokaryotic cell, the cell comprising a first nucleotide sequence that encodes a nitric oxide synthase, and a second nucleotide sequence that encodes a folding agonist; and

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(ii) isolating the nitric oxide synthase apoenzyme from the cell.

36. A method of producing nitric oxide synthase comprising obtaining apoenzyme and incubating the apoenzyme with tetrahydrobiopterin.
- 5
37. A biological host cell comprising a protease-deficient prokaryotic cell, the cell comprising an expression vector that contains a first nucleotide sequence that encodes a selected protein and a second nucleotide sequence that encodes a folding agonist.
- 10
38. The biological host cell according to claim 37, wherein the second nucleotide sequence encoding a folding agonist is contained on a separate expression vector.
- 15
39. The biological host cell according to claim 37, wherein the selected protein may be a large heme, flavin, or prosthetic group containing protein.
- 20
40. The biological host cell according to claim 37, wherein the protease-deficient prokaryotic cell is *E. coli*, *Serratia*, *Salmonella*, *Pseudomonas*, *Shigella*, *Enterobacter*, *Proteus*, or *Erwinia*.
- 25
41. The biological host cell according to claim 37 wherein the folding agonist is GroEL, GroES, HSP6, HSP10, or HSP90.
- 30

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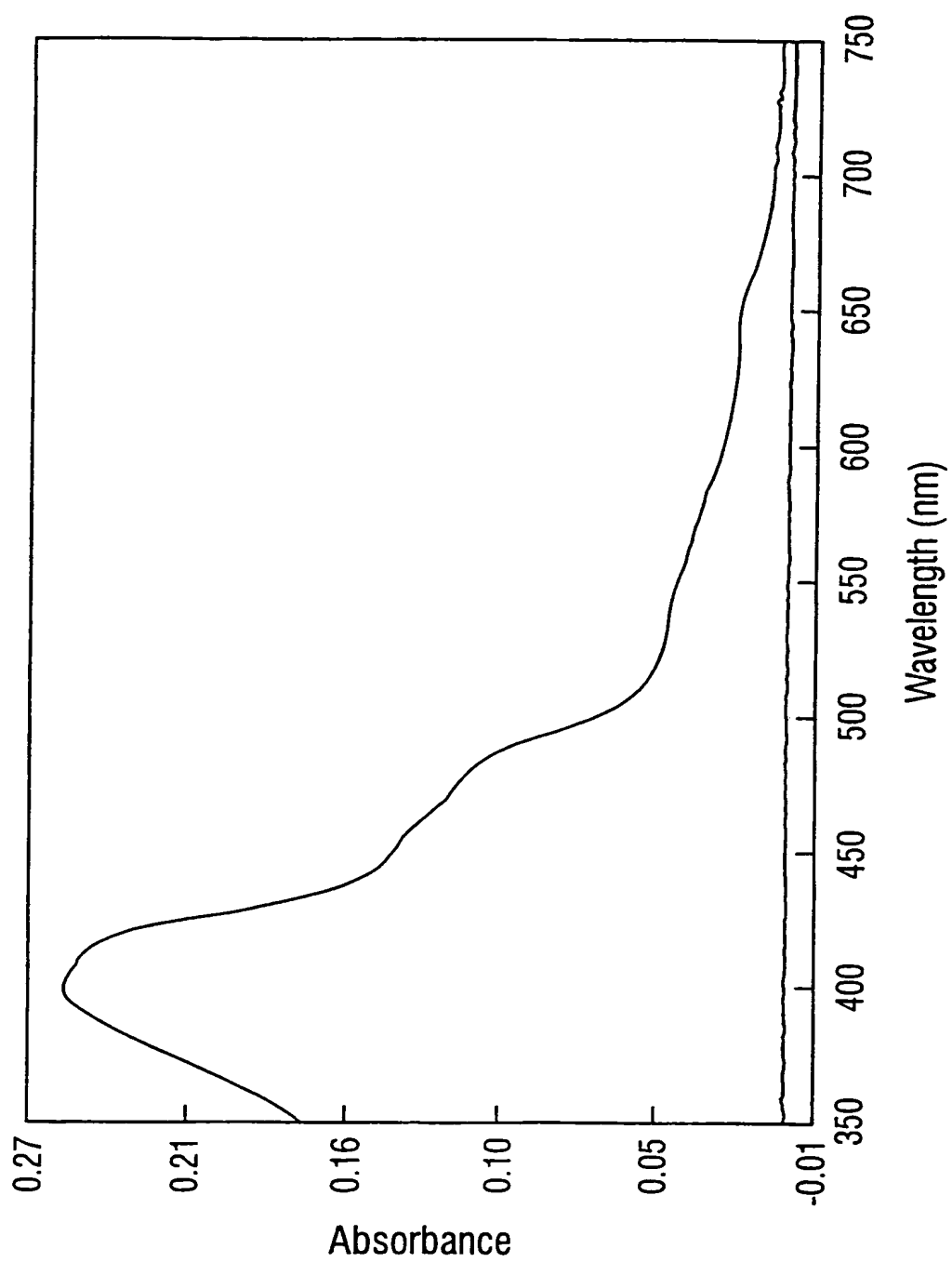


FIG. 1A

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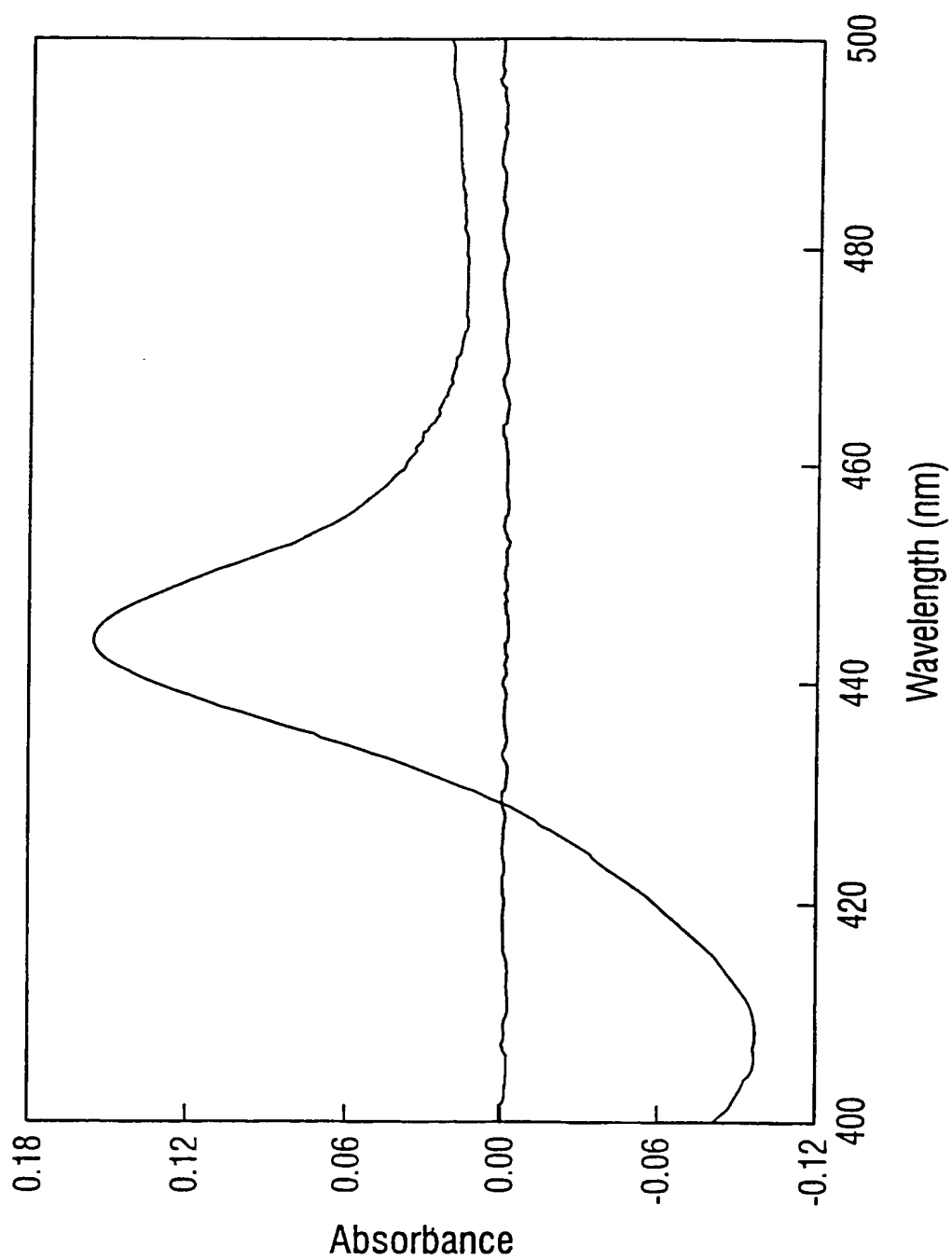


FIG. 1B

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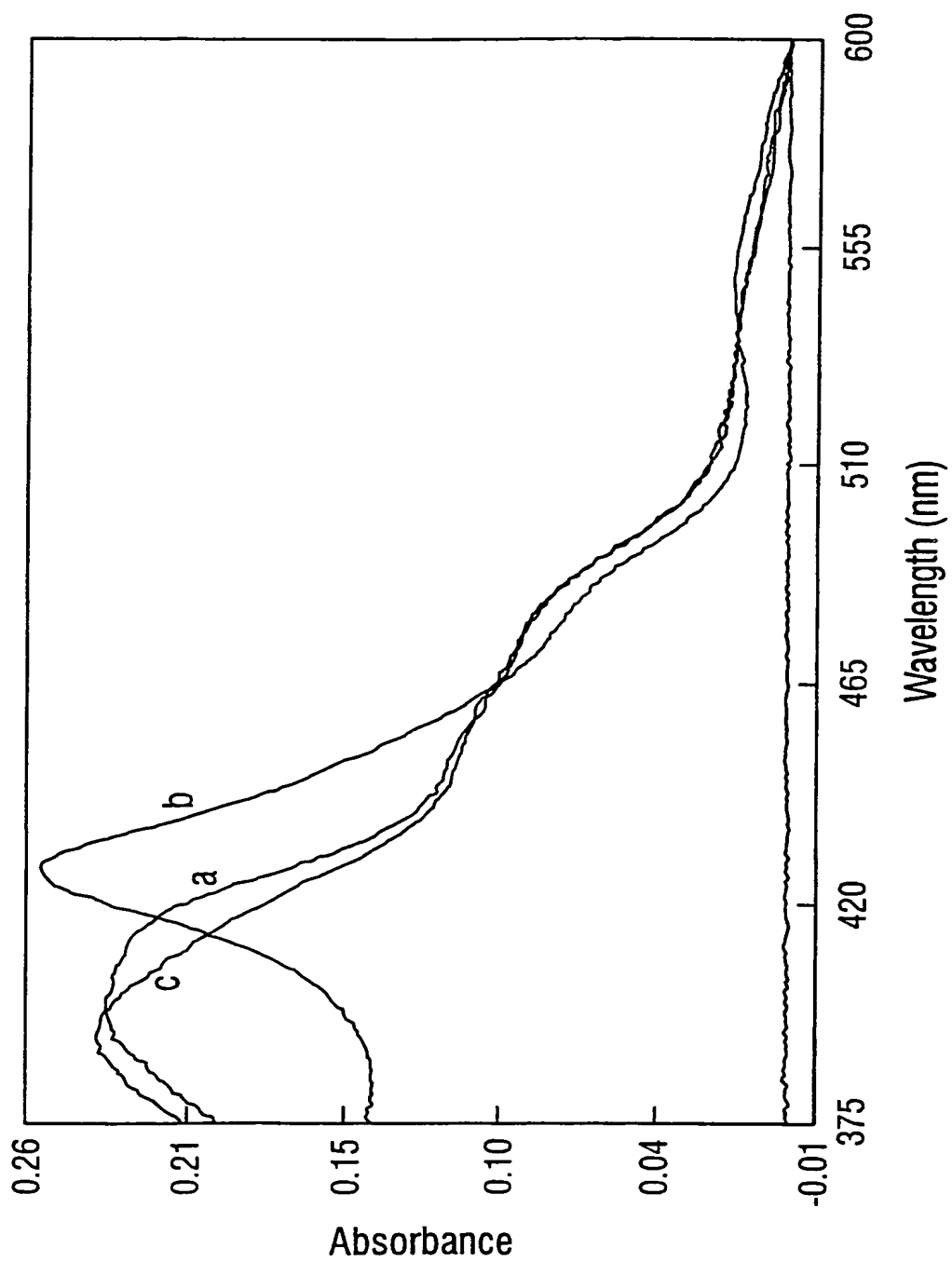


FIG. 2

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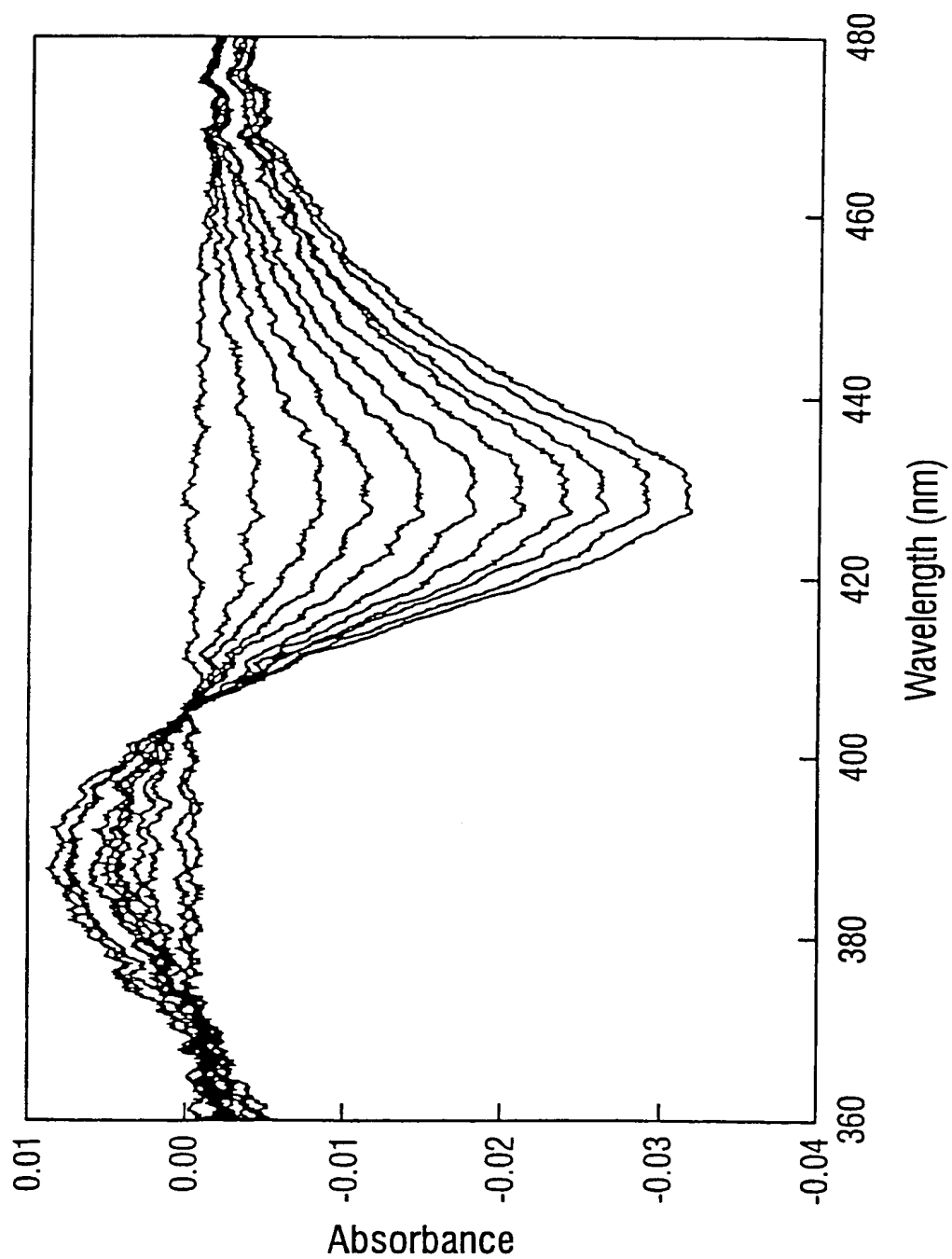


FIG. 3A

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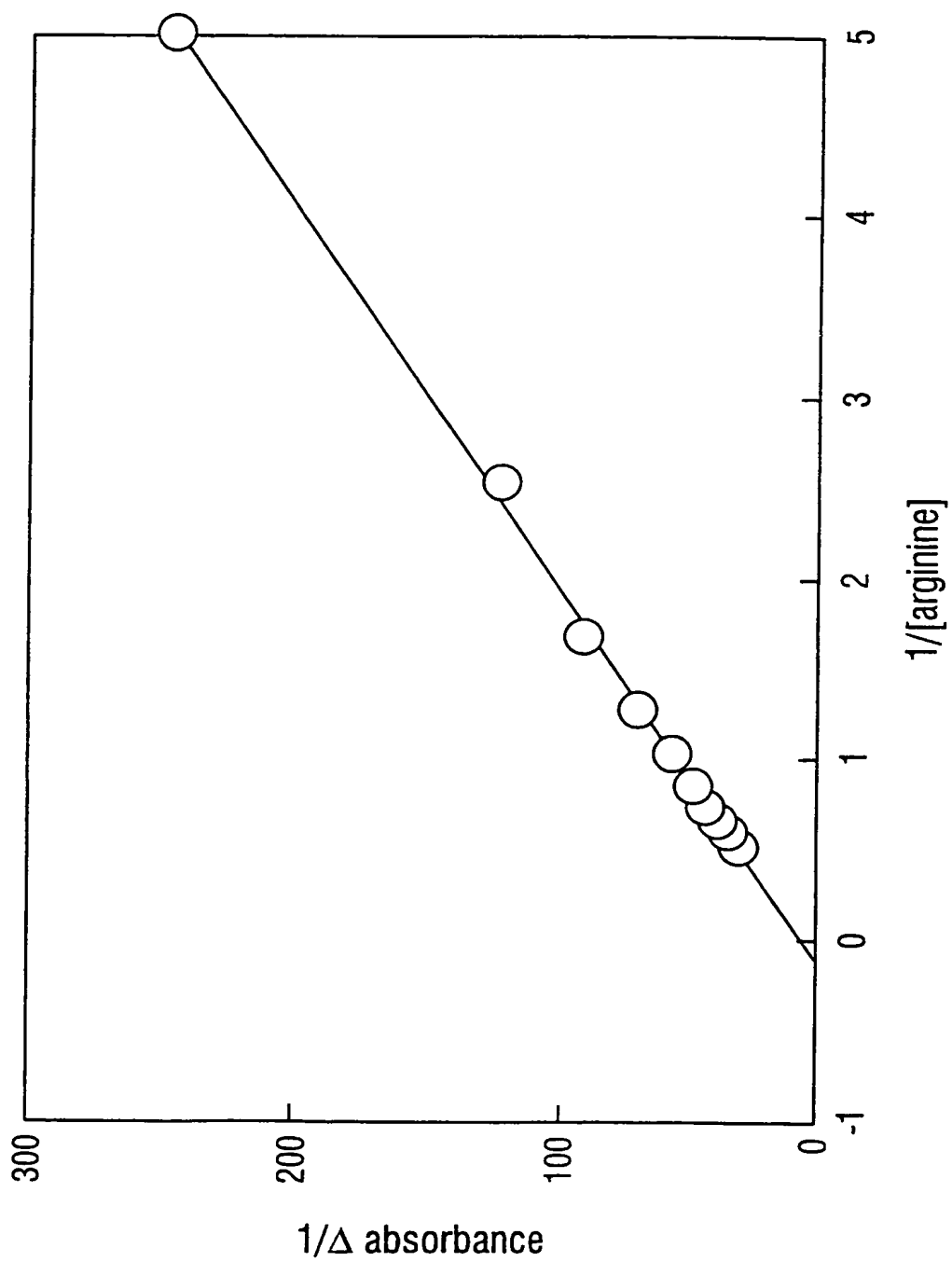


FIG. 3B

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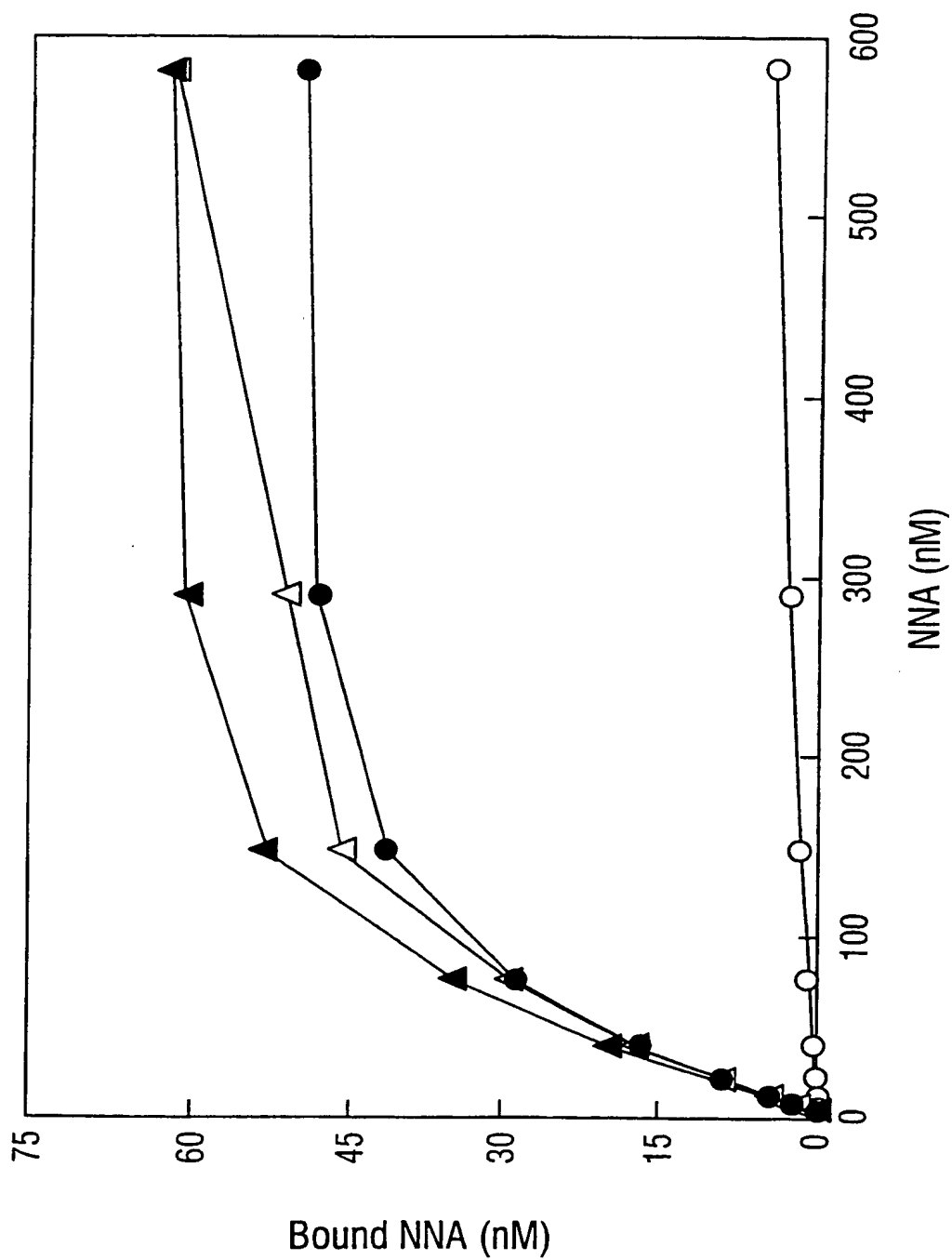


FIG. 4

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INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.

PCT/US96/14045

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

IPC(6) : C12N 9/00

US CL : 435/183

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

U.S. : 435/183

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)

APS, CAPLUS, EMBASE, MEDLINE, SCISEARCH, WPIDS

TERMS: NITRIC OXIDE SYNTHASE#, CLON###, SEQUENC###, PROTEASE DEFICIENT, GROE##, CHAPERON##

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
Y	BREDT et al. Cloned and expressed nitric oxide synthase structurally resembles cytochrome P-450 reductase. Nature. 27 June 1991, Vol. 351, pages 714-718, see entire document.	1-41
Y	STUDIER et al. 'Use of T7 RNA Polymerase to Direct Expression of Cloned Genes.' In: Methods in Enzymology. Edited by D.V. Goeddel. New York: Academic Press, Inc., 1990, Vol. 185, pages 60-89, see entire document.	1-41



Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C.



See patent family annex.

* Special categories of cited documents:	*T* later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention
A document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance	*X* document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone
E earlier document published on or after the international filing date	*Y* document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art
L document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified)	*Z* document member of the same patent family
O document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means	
P document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed	

Date of the actual completion of the international search

Date of mailing of the international search report

06 NOV 1996

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INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.
PCT/US96/14045

C (Continuation). DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
Y	LEE et al. Effect of Overproduction of Heat Shock Chaperones GroESL and DnaK on Human Procollagenase Production in Escherichia coli. The Journal of Biological Chemistry. 15 February 1992, Vol. 267, No. 5, pages 2849-2852, see entire document.	12, 17-20, 22, 23, 27-29 and 31-41.
Y	CHARLES et al. Cloning and Expression of a Rat Neuronal Nitric Oxide Synthase Coding Sequence in a Baculovirus/Insect Cell System. Biochemical and Biophysical Research Communications. 15 November 1993, Vol. 196, No. 3, pages 1481-1489, see entire document.	27-29, 32-34 and 36.
A, E	MAKRIDES, S.C. Strategies for Achieving High-Level Expression of Genes in Escherichia coli. Microbiological Reviews. September 1996, Vol. 60, No. 3, pages 512-538, especially pages 522-524.	1-41